論文

Teaching International Relations in Japan:
How to Introduce the Yugoslav Civil War in a Culturally Diverse Classroom

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Abstract

Japan's higher educational environment has become progressively globalized. The number of international students has been steadily growing and in the university classrooms, students and teachers gather from almost all corners of the globe. In order to meet educational needs of both Japanese and foreign students, a globalized classroom necessitates different, more diversified pedagogical approaches. In the present article, I describe a model to teach about modern international conflicts in a multicultural teaching environment and present my personal experience in the application of the model when introducing undergraduate students at Josai University's (JU) Faculty of Contemporary Policy Studies to the Yugoslav civil war during the 1990s.

Keywords: International Relations, war, Yugoslavia, Japan, teaching, cultural diversity

1. Introduction

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) plans to boost the number of foreign students in Japan up to 300,000 by 2020.[1] Judging from the latest statistics, the target will probably be reached earlier. According to Japan Student Service Organization (JASSO), the number of foreign students in Japan in 2016 already stood at 239,287 students; a 14.8% increase from the previous year.[2] Consequently, as foreign students are increasingly entering Japanese universities, the structure and contents of Japan's higher education have begun to change. Many university campuses around the country have already become culturally, linguistically much more diverse and the teaching environment has been steadily transforming. This has presented new challenges to the teaching professional in Japanese higher education; namely, how to satisfy basic educational needs of the diminishing number of Japanese students, while simultaneously delivering teaching contents to a diversified and multicultural teaching environment. Teachers and instructors at JU have also not been spared by this dilemma.

JU belongs to the group of Japanese universities that have been actively promoting a policy of educational internationalization and it has been successful in attracting more and more

foreign students into its central academic programs.[3] Internationalization has presented JU with new opportunities in terms of stronger international academic ties; for example, with the European Visegrad (V4) countries and strengthening of other areas closely related to its long-term educational and research goals.[4]

On the other hand, growing internationalization presents challenges. It commands change and adaptation. Welcoming more and more foreign students demands very specific administrative, organizational and curricular reforms. Especially teaching and pedagogical aspects necessitate a thorough reevaluation and specific tailoring to the learning needs and goals of international students. For example, academic programs and courses that attract a larger ratio of foreign students impact the overall structure of the classroom, making it more diverse and complex to manage.

Internationalization of higher education in Japan has reshaped and revitalized the university classrooms; mostly, I think, by adding a new dimension to the pedagogical process. It has introduced a new dynamic into the traditional modes of teaching and interacting with students. Instructors have to engage with students who can hardly communicate in the local language. International students also come from different educational backgrounds with very different educational cultures. For example, students from Western cultures where Socratic pedagogical approaches (e.g. debating, class discussions and critical evaluation of each other's contributions) are the norm, express considerable difficulties in adapting to a more passive, hierarchical Confucian teaching style, which is often met in the Japanese universities.[5] This means that in a culturally heterogeneous teaching environment, greater variations in learning preferences are likely to co-exist.[6] However, if the instructional variety is weak, then expanding the number of available learning choices should be considered. For if the instructor is not aware of the cultural, religious, and even political background of the student, the effectiveness of her/his teaching will suffer.

This brings me to the main purpose of the present article. In the past few years that I have been teaching at the JU Faculty of Contemporary Policy Studies, my courses have recorded a consistently higher ratio of international students. On average, at least one-third of seminar participants have been non-Japanese students. Furthermore, courses taught in English show an even higher ratio of internationalization. This has presented me with a pedagogical question regarding how to teach in a multicultural classroom. No single method has been able to satisfy the learning needs of all students in equal degree. Methods like debating that normally suit European students have proved difficult to be implemented with home students, who often appear reluctant to speak out in open discussions. Other methods, like independent group activities, have delivered mixed responses; although they are much more promising when compared to class discussions or debating. In this sense, a multicultural teaching environment has proved quite challenging.

At the same time, however, I believe a culturally heterogeneous classroom offers potential benefits as well. When one is able to tap into the diversity that a multicultural environment

presents, the teaching process can be enriched, especially when attempting to develop secondary learning goals, like intercultural understanding and intercultural communication skills. In the present article I will describe a specific example regarding how I followed a model to teach a culturally diverse undergraduate course on the changing nature of post-Cold War international conflicts. More specifically, I will explain how I applied a teaching scheme proposed by Merry M. Merryfield and Richard C. Remy to teach about international conflict and peace.[7] In the following sections, I will first introduce the Merryfield-Remy model, explaining its basic components. Then I will present how I applied it in my course on selected topics in International Relations (IR) when teaching about the post-Cold War international conflicts. Finally, in the conclusion I will assess and reflect about what I observed during the application of this model and offer some possible suggestions for its application in the future.

2. Teaching about international conflict and peace: The Merryfield-Remy model

Teaching sensitive topics in international relations, like terrorism or ethnic conflicts, has the innate potential of burdening the learning process, in particular when students come from a different cultural, national and religious background. In this regard, one of the teacher's main responsibilities should be to design a teaching environment conductive to learning, simultaneously minimizing potential tensions due to differences in students' individual values, principles and even political beliefs.[8] For example, teaching topics, like territorial disputes, to a university class in Japan that includes a large number of exchange students from China, requires situational attention and awareness. Failing to do so might invite student resentment; it might even offend and repress student's readiness to participate in the learning process. However, when done correctly, such issues can change into a catalyst for improved learning, and can even help foster secondary goals like development of intercultural communication skills and mutual tolerance.[9]

In case of classes dealing with international conflict and peace, Merryfield and Remy (1995) have proposed a model that can assist the teacher in planning more effective courses; also in case of culturally heterogeneous classrooms. The model is based on six assumptions that work as guidelines for designing and even evaluating courses in international relations. They are general enough to be applicable also to courses in other disciplines. The six assumptions include considerations about students' backgrounds, teaching content, active-reflective learning, students' values, pedagogical methods and interrelatedness of content, educational goals and instructional methods (Table 1).

The first assumption emphasizes the importance of knowing the students' backgrounds. In order to develop the optimal curriculum, the instructor must be acquainted with the student's nationality, his/her personal interests, academic aspirations and other relevant information. Knowing your students also helps detect possible issues that might arise due to differences in students' backgrounds.

Second, the course should present enough contextual knowledge about key facts and circumstances related to the topic, simultaneously introducing enquiry and problem-solving tasks into the learning process. Third, students should be encouraged and stimulated to actively engage in their learning. 'Solely exposing students to content is not sufficient to achieve satisfactory learning outcome. Instead, students should be enabled to learn by engaging in a reflective process in which they make the information their own by evaluating, applying and using the studied content.'[10]

Fourth assumption is concerned with the need to address the role and place of values in learning about social issues. Social sciences should not avoid the question of values, especially when dealing with controversial topics. Responsible teaching should also help the student think about the role that other social categories like gender, religion, race and ethnicity play, for example, in international relations.

Fifth, teaching must take into account different learning styles and learners' needs. For this reason, it is imperative to employ a variety of pedagogical methods. A diversified pedagogical approach can enrich the classroom and 'enables students to demonstrate their strengths while working on their weaknesses, and at the same time encourages teachers to improve constantly their teaching by looking for new materials and integrating new methods'.[11] Finally, the sixth assumption emphasizes the need to actively connect content, educational goals and teaching methods. For example, while lecturing represents one of the best ways to convey a large amount of information, teachers must be aware of the differences among teaching goals and the best or most efficient methods to attain them. Besides lectures, we can access a vast array of teaching tools ranging from seminar-based discussion groups, several forms of presentations, research papers, etc. Especially in terms of contents, audio-visual tools can assist in offering students a more direct experience of content. This also offers the added benefit of engaging students emotionally; another important area of student development.

Table 1 Merryfield-Remy's six 'assumptions about teaching and learning'[12]

1) Planning begins with knowledge of one's students
2) Content is basic
3) Active, reflective learning is essential
4) Attention to values is necessary
5) Instructions must have variety
6) Content, methods and educational goals are connected

3. Teaching about civil war in former Yugoslavia: Model application

Here I would like to describe the practical application of the Merryfield-Remy model to an undergraduate course on International Relations (IR) that I delivered at the JU Faculty of Contemporary Policy Studies during the spring semester in 2017. The official course title was 'Selected Topics in International Relations' and had 33 participants. More than half (54%) of course members were international students – 13 from China and 5 from the V4 countries.

The course began with a general assessment of students' understanding of basic concepts of IR. Students were given a short multiple-choice questionnaire and asked to grade their own understanding of key ideas like state and nation, Westphalian system, neoliberal theories of IR, UN peacekeeping operations, Cold War and terrorism. On average, students from V4 countries showed a considerably higher level of basic conceptual understanding than Japanese and Chinese students who had often heard about the concepts, but were unable to explain them.

After the questionnaire assessment, students were asked to talk about their specific interests and motivation to study IR. Although answers varied individually, this exercise proved helpful in assessing the general distribution of interests and expectations towards the course. In terms of Merryfield-Remy model, these preparatory activates fell under assumption 1 about the need to learn more about students' backgrounds. In this regard, when considering how to proceed with the introduction of the civil war in former Yugoslavia, I was able to learn that in general students had very low knowledge about the historical and political context of the Balkans and what happened there during the 1990s. This was extremely helpful in the selection of teaching content (model assumption 2) and methods of delivery (model assumption 5).

One of the central concerns in this course was the use of language. The official course language was Japanese; however, due to its lower proficiency among international students, class explanations and assignments were supplemented with English. However, a few Chinese exchange students had problems with English, hence the solution was not optimal; but it offered the opportunity for cooperative learning. Students with better foreign language skills assisted those who had difficulties, which was a positive by-product that enhanced classroom cohesion. Additionally, Japanese students were also indirectly motivated to use English as a learning tool and often approached international students for help in understanding class assignments and sources delivered during classes. In this way, language did not inhibit, but contributed to active and cooperative learning, supplemented with regular group activities (model assumption 3).

In terms of contents (model assumption 2), the example of civil war in former Yugoslavia was introduced as a case study to illustrate the mechanism, dynamics and central issues related to the nature of post-Cold War conflicts in general. In the presentation of the case, I set three learning goals. We first explored the changing nature of modern international conflicts through the lenses of shifting international order and its power configuration. The second

goal was to learn about the role of international institutions in mitigating international conflicts in the post-Cold war era. In these segments, students were asked to concentrate on the critical assessment of the United Nations' (UN) role in the Yugoslav conflict. The third goal was about better understanding the role of international global media in ethnic conflicts (the CNN effect). More specifically, students were encouraged to reflect about how the emergence of global media impacts the conduct of foreign policy, for example, in the area of peacemaking. Having clearly defined learning goals, it became much easier to connect those goals to specific content and methods for instruction (model assumption 6).

I decided to use four instructional approaches. These included a home reading assignment, a lecture, two video screenings and group activities. As a home assignment, students had to read an introductory textbook chapter about the history of international wars and were then given a basic assessment about what they read. The assessment was then followed up by a short lecture focusing on the characteristics of post-Cold War conflicts. Students were introduced to the relationship between the structure of international order, ethnic conflicts and the concept of failed states. After the lecture, students watched a 30-minute long documentary about the Yugoslav conflict presented by a veteran Japanese journalist who visited Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and interviewed various parties involved in the conflict.

Video screening was selected mostly because 'findings suggest that films (including full-length features, documentaries, and selected clips) may sometimes enhance student interest in key topics in international security and seem to promote some empathy for diverse perspectives'.[13] Video contents have also been shown to 'provide a deeper understanding of the complexity of security issues as well as a common bond or "language" for discussion of issues within a visual (and often emotional) context'.[14]

During the last sessions, the same topic was covered from the perspective of popular culture, especially how the Yugoslav war has been portrayed in major films. Students watched the Oscar winning film *No Man's Land* (*2001*), which describes the story of two enemy soldiers caught in a ceasefire zone. The movie was selected because it presents a powerful critique of the international community's impotence and failure to prevent genocide at Europe's front steps. It openly criticizes UN peacekeeping operations and the role globalized media played in the desensitization and diminished emotional responsiveness of the international public to modern acts of international violence.

After every screening, students gathered in groups and reflected on specific questions related to the screened contents. For example, they were asked to discuss the various images of UN in the videos and talk about what kind of emotional response they had towards the narratives of the documentary and film. Here the aim was to engage the student's reflective and emotional response (model assumption 3) and consider the role of values, ethnicity and religion as the bases for aggression and violence in international relations (model assumption 4).

4. Conclusion

In the present article, I attempted to briefly sketch my experience in teaching a multicultural, multilinguistic classroom at JU in Japan. As I discuss the issues raised here with other colleagues, there is not a single day without someone mentioning the difficulties we met when addressing a progressively diverse and internationalized teaching environment. Being a foreigner, a non-Japanese instructor presents additional difficulties, which I have not addressed in the present paper, but nonetheless represent another important aspect of my academic activities in a Japanese university. When observed through its higher educational arena, Japan – often portrayed as a relatively culturally homogeneous country – shows a degree of diversity, which is hard to imagine. This hidden reality has put additional pressure on the Japanese teaching professional who must, whether she/he wants it, begin considering how to adapt her/his curriculum and teaching methods to a culturally and linguistically progressive and diverse academic environment.

I attempted to present a model for teaching about international conflicts in the post-Cold War era in Japan, simultaneously offering an example of how I used it in my teaching sessions concerning the Yugoslav war during the 1990s. The model proved to be a valuable guide in designing teaching sessions, which in the end were dynamic, diverse and fun to teach. From both Japanese and international students' perspectives, I received encouraging reviews, which also showed through students' active participation in class discussions that often continued after the class ended. I would highly recommend the guidelines described in this paper, not as unbreakable rules to be followed scrupulously, but more as reminders about how to enrich our teaching by being more student-centered and more aware of the changing needs in our classrooms.

Notes

1 "Japanese Ministry of Education to Enrol Further 100,000 Foreign Students by 2020 – Study International," accessed November 2, 2017, https://www.studyinternational.com/news/japanese-ministry-of-education-to-enrol-further-100000-foreign-students-by-2020/#FzklV5a5vmrVGs0u.97.

2 "International Students in Japan 2016 – JASSO," accessed November 2, 2017, http://www.jasso.go.jp/en/about/statistics/intl_student/data2016.html.

3 For example, the JU International Education Center records a 22% increase in the number of international students between 2015 and 2017.

4 "Medium-Term Goals《7J-Vision》(2016-2020)| About Josai University Educational Corporation | Josai University Educational Corporation," accessed November 3, 2017, http://www.josai.jp/en/about/medium_target/.

5 Ulrich Kühnen et al., "Challenge Me! Communicating in Multicultural Classrooms ," *Social Psychology of Education* (Dordrecht : Springer Netherlands , 2012), doi:10.1007/s11218-011-9169-8.

6 Glauco De Vita, "Learning Styles, Culture and Inclusive Instruction in the Multicultural Classroom: A

Business and Management Perspective," *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 38, no. 2 (January 1, 2001): 165–74, doi:10.1080/14703290110035437.

7 Merry M Merryfield and Richard C Remy, *Teaching about International Conflict and Peace* (Suny Press, 1995).

8 Cathy Gormley-Heenan and Simon Lightfoot, *Teaching Politics and International Relations* (Springer, 2012), 164.

9 Ibid., 165.

10 Ibid., 168.

11 Ibid., 169.

12 Merryfield and Remy, *Teaching about International Conflict and Peace*, 7–10.

13 Robert W Glover and Daniel Tagliarina, *Teaching Politics beyond the Book: Film, Texts, and New Media in the Classroom* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2012), 246.

14 Ibid.

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